

# T H E L O U N G E R.

[N<sup>o</sup> XCVI.]

Saturday, Dec. 2. 1786.

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

*Aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat.*

VIRG.

S I R,

AS in reading, either for instruction or entertainment, one is always most struck with what comes nearest to one's self, we who are in the country have been particularly attentive to your rural papers. The family of which I am a member at present, have been very much entertained with them. We have found out several of our acquaintance in the letter of *Urbanus*; and even the picture of your godmother, though a little antiquated, was too strongly marked, for some of our party not to discover a resemblance to it. *Adraffus's* portrait of himself was too serious for our meddling with. We never allow our imaginations to sport with the sacredness of sorrow.

Since the receipt of those papers, it has become an amusement here to draw sketches for the Lounger; and some of us last night after supper proposed, that every one should paint his neighbour. To this fancy and a rainy morning you owe this letter. I will try to give you the whole groupe; I am sure if I could do it justice, it should please your benevolent readers better than the picture of *Urbanus*, though I give that gentleman perfect credit for the fidelity as well as the power of his pencil. But a family-piece of *Greuze* is more pleasing, though perhaps less valued, than one of *Hemskirk* or *Teniers*.

That I may however take no advantage, I will begin with myself. I am not of so serious a disposition as *Adraffus*, yet am I not altogether without some of that rural sentiment which he indulges, and which you describe. I own I had acuter feelings some five and twenty years ago; but having now lived half a century, I am become a good deal less heroic, less visionary, and less tender than I was; yet I have not forgotten what my own feelings were, and I can perfectly understand what those of younger men are; I confess I like to see them as warm as I myself was at their age, and enjoy a sort of self-flattery in thinking that I have learned to be wiser, by being a little older than they. Something of the same reflection I venture now and then to indulge, from the circumstance of being a bachelor; I think myself as well as I am, and yet I am pleased to see a husband and a father happy. And as I am neither from age nor situation quite condemned to celibacy, I have that sort of interest in an amiable woman, or a promising child, that makes their company very agreeable to me, and I believe mine not unpleasant to them. I have, thank God, good health and good spirits; was bred somewhat of a scholar by my father, who lived in town, and a pretty complete sportsman by my grandfather, who resided in the country. When at school, I stole an hour or two in the evening to learn music, and had a tolerable knack at making bad verses when at college. In short, there are few things come across me in which I am quite left out, and I have not the vanity of excellence to support in any of them.

I generally spend some months of Autumn in the country, and this season have passed them very agreeably at the house of a gentleman, who, from particular circumstances, I am pretty confident is the person you once mentioned under the appellation of *Benevolus*. A general

ral idea of his character you have given in the paper I allude to: of his family and their country life, will you allow me to try a little sketch now?

You have hinted at the use Benevolus makes of his wealth. In the country, as far as we can gather from those around him, he gives largely; but as it is neither from the impulse of sickly sentiment or shallow vanity, his largesses tend oftener to incite industry than to supply indigence. Indeed, I have been forced to observe, that to nurse poverty is, politically speaking, to harbour idleness and vice; to prevent it is much the better way; for a man seldom thrives that does not deserve to thrive; and, except from some unfortunate accidents, which Benevolus is ever ready to pity and to redress, a man is seldom poor without deserving to be so. The occupiers of Benevolus's estate are generally thriving: he says, that to promote this is not an expensive indulgence; but, on the contrary, that he gains by it. 'Tis some money advanced at first, says he; but no capital is more productive than that which is laid out on the happiness of one's people. Some plans indeed have been suggested to him for doubling the revenue of his estate, by dispeopling it of three fourths of its inhabitants; but he would never consent to them. If I wished for money, he replied to an adviser of these schemes, there are many trades you should rather recommend to me; but the proudest property of a country gentleman is that of men. He has not however that inordinate desire for extending the bounds of his estate that some great proprietors have. A gentleman, whose family had been reduced in its circumstances, offered his land to him for sale. Benevolus expressed his sorrow for the necessity that forced the neighbour to this measure, and after examining into his affairs, gave him credit to the extent of his debts. The young man went abroad, and from the recommendation of his honesty and worth, and great assiduity in business, acquired a fortune sufficient to redeem his affairs. Somebody observed what an enviable purchase that gentleman's land would have been to Benevolus. "But those acres would not have dined with me with such a face of happiness and gratitude as Mr — did to-day."

Such faces, indeed, are a favourite part of the entertainment at Benevolus's table. One day of the week, which he jokingly calls his wife's rout day, there is an additional leaf put to the table, for the reception of some of the principal farmers on his estate, from whose conversation, he says, he derives much useful knowledge in country business, and in the management of his affairs. He behaves to them in such a way as to remove all restraint from the inequality of rank; and talking to every man on the subject he knows best, makes every man more pleased with himself, and more useful to those who hear him. The reception indeed of those guests strongly marks the propriety of feeling and of behaviour of the family. There is none of that sneer and tittering which one sees among the young gentlemen and ladies of other tables; the children strive who shall help the senior farmer of the set; they ask questions about the different members of his household, and sometimes send little presents to his children. I have had the charge of some parties of the young people, who dined with the farmers in return; and then we have so many long stories when we come back in the evening. There are no such eggs, nor fowls, nor cream, as we meet with in those excursions. I am always appealed to as a voucher; and I can safely say, that we thought so, especially when we took a long walk, or fished, or shot by the way.

Benevolus has four sons and three daughters. Their education has been scrupulously attended to; and there are perhaps no young people of their age more accomplished. When I speak of their accom-

plishments,

plishments, I do not mean only their skill in the ordinary branches of education, music, dancing, drawing, and so forth. I have seen such acquirements pass through the memory and the fingers of young people, yet leave little fruit behind them. It is not so with my young friends here; not only are the faculties employed, but the mind is enriched by all their studies. I have learned a great deal of true philosophy, during the rainy days of this season, from the little philosophers in Benevolus's library; and when I indulge myself in a morning's lounge beside the young ladies and their mother, I always rise with sentiments better regulated, with feelings more attuned than when I sat down. The young people's accomplishments are sometimes shewn, but never exhibited; brought forth, unassumingly, to bestow pleasure on others, not to minister to their own vanity, or that of their parents. In music their talents are such as might attract the applause of the most skilful; yet they never refuse to exert them in the style that may please the most ignorant. Music their father confesses he is fond of, beyond the moderation of a philosopher. 'Tis a relaxation, he says, which indulges without debasing the feelings, which employs without wasting the mind. The first time I was here I had rode in a very bad day through a very dreary road; it was dark before I reached the house. The transition from the battering rain, the howling wind, and a flooded road, to a saloon lighted cheerily up, and filled with the mingled sounds of their family-concert, was so delightful, that I shall never forget it.

There is however a living harmony in the appearance of the family, that adds considerably to the pleasure of this and every other entertainment. To see how the boys hang upon their father, and with what looks of tenderness the girls gather round their mother! "To be happy at home," said Benevolus one day to me, when we were talking of the sex, "is one of the best dowries we can give a daughter with a good husband, and the best preventative against her chusing a bad one. How many miserable matches have I known some of my neighbours girls make, merely to escape from the prison of their father's house; and having married for freedom, they resolved to be as little as they could in their husband's."

Benevolus's Lady, though the mother of so many children, is still a very fine woman. That lofty elegance, however, which, in her younger days, I remember awing so many lovers into adoration, she has now softened into a matron gentleness, which is infinitely engaging. There is a modest neatness in her dress, a chastened grace in her figure, a sort of timid liveliness in her conversation, which we cannot but love ourselves, and are not surprised to see her husband look on with delight. In the management of her household-concerns, she exerts a quiet and unperceived attention to her family and her guests, to their convenience, their sports, their amusements, which accommodates every one without the tax of seeing it bustled for. In the little circles at breakfast, where the plans of the day are laid, one never finds those faces of embarrassment, those whispers of concealment, which may be observed in some houses. Mamma is applied to in all arrangements, consulted in schemes for excursions, in the difficulty of interfering engagements, and is often pressed to be of parties, which she sometimes enlivens with her presence.

Benevolus, in the same manner, is frequently the companion of his son's sports, and rides very keenly after an excellent pack of harriers, though they say he has gone rather seldomer out this season than he used to do, having got so good a deputy in me. He was disputing t'other day with the clergyman of the parish, a very learned and a very worthy man, on the love of sport. "I allow, my good Sir, (said Benevolus), that there are better uses for time; but exclusive of exer-

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"cise to the body, there are so many dissipations more hurtful to the mind, (dissipations even of reading, of thinking, and of feeling, which are never reckoned on as such), that if sport be harmless, it is useful. I have another reason for encouraging it in my son. It will give him an additional tie to the country, which is to be the chief scene of his future life, as a man likes his wife the better that, besides more important accomplishments, she can sing and dance; and in both cases, a man of a feeling mind will connect with the mere amusement ideas of affection, and remembrances of tenderness. Methinks I perceive an error in the system of education which some country-gentlemen follow with their sons. They send them, when lads, to study at foreign universities, and to travel into foreign countries, and then expect them, rather unreasonably, to become country-gentlemen at their return. My son shall travel to see other countries, but he shall first learn to love his own. There is a polish, there are ornaments, I know, which travel gives; but the basis must be an attachment to home. My son's ruffles may be of lace, but his shirt must be of more durable stuff."

In this purpose Benevolus has perfectly succeeded with his son, who is now eighteen, with much of the information of a man, but with all the unassuming modesty of a boy. 'Tis his pleasure and his pride to acknowledge the claims which his native scenes have upon him. He knows the name of every hamlet, and of its inhabitants; he visits them when he can be of use, gives encouragement to their improvements, and distributes rewards to the industrious. In return, they feel the most perfect fealty and regard to him. The old men observe how like he is to his father; and their wives trace the eyes and the lips of his mother.

The same good sense in their management, and a similar attention to their happiness, is shewn to every inferior member of Benevolus's household. His domestics revere and love him; yet regularity and attention are no where so habitual. Attention to every guest is one of the first lessons a servant learns at this house, and an attention of that useful and benevolent sort which is exactly the reverse of what is practised at some great houses in the country, where a man is vastly well attended, provided he has attendants of his own that make it needless; but a person of inferior rank may wait some time before he can find a servant whose province it is to take any care of him. At Benevolus's, it is every man's province to shew a stranger kindness; and there is an aspect of welcome in every domestic one meets. Even the mastiff in the court is so gentle, so humanized by the children, and "bears his faculties so meek," that the very beggar is not afraid of *Trusty*, tho' he bays him.

In such quarters, and with such society, I do not count the weeks of my stay, like your correspondent *Urbanus*. The family talks of not visiting Edinburgh sooner than Christmas, and it is not improbable that I may stay with them till that time: so if your coffeehouse-friend takes notes of arrivals this winter, he may possibly mark me down in my seat in the coach destined for N<sup>o</sup> 7. answering the questions of two cherub-faced boys, who are a sort of pupils of mine here in all the idle branches of their education.

I am,

S I R,

Your most obedient servant,

W. G.

E D I N B U R G H :

Published by WILLIAM CREECH; by whom Communications from Correspondents are received.

Next Saturday will be published N<sup>o</sup> XC VII.